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ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

DILECTIC AND PHILANTHROPI

SOCIETIES.

AT

CHAPEL HILL, N. C.

JUNE 25, 1834.

BY THE HON. JAMES IREDELL.

Chapel Hill:

PRINTED BY ISAAC C. PATRIDGE,

1834.



CORRESPONDENCE.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA, JUNE 26th, 1831.

Dear Sir—The undersigned have been appointed a Committee, by the Philanthropic Society, to request for publication a copy of your Address, delivered on the day preceding Commencement. They take pleasure in communicating to you the high satisfaction which it afforded and the flattering approbation with which it was received. They take this opportunity of making their acknowledgments for the salutary advice which it contained and the lessons of wisdom which it inculcated.

Yours, very respectfully,

RICH'D B. CREECY,
HAYWOOD W. GUION, } Committee
JAMES H. HUTCHINS, }

Hon. JAMES IREDELL.



RALEIGH, JUNE 28th, 1831.

Young Gentlemen—I received on the 26th instant, a note of that date, which you addressed to me as a Committee of the Philanthropic Society, requesting for publication a copy of the Address delivered to the two Societies of the University on the day before the Commencement.—Constant occupation has prevented me from answering it until to-day.—I can say with unaffected sincerity that I know of no merit in the Address which should entitle it to the honor of being published by the Society. If you believe, however, that any good may result from such a course, I am willing to defer to your judgment, and will furnish you with a copy as soon as I can make a fair one, having had no opportunity of doing so before it was delivered.

For your own very complimentary note, and for the favorable opinion entertained by the Society of this humble effort, I tender to yourselves and to them my sincere acknowledgments.

With great esteem, your obedient servant,

J.A. IREDELL.

Messrs. RICH'D B. CREECY, }
HAYWOOD W. GUION, } Committee of the Philanthropic Society.
JAMES H. HUTCHINS, }

ADDRESS.

*Young Gentlemen of the Dialectic
and Philanthropic Societies:*

I appear before you in obedience to the invitation with which you honored me. In accepting this invitation, I have given you the strongest proof of my desire to gratify your wishes and of my willingness to contribute my portion, however humble, to the entertainments of the day. Unskilled in literary exercises, an unfrequent worshipper in the temples of the Muses, and unaccustomed to the character you have assigned me, had I any vanity to be mortified, I should have shrunk from a task, the performance of which has heretofore been illustrated by genius and taste and eloquence. Having, however, no object but your good, I shall be amply rewarded for all personal sacrifice, if any thing I can say on this occasion shall have the effect of animating one virtuous principle, of giving constancy to one generous impulse or vigor to one noble resolution.

I can well imagine, my young friends, the emotions you feel on this return of the annual Collegiate Jubilee—your joy at having passed honorably through another year of preparation for the great duties of life—the bright hopes of the future, which you cherish with all the enthusiasm of youth. There are other hearts, which palpitate on this occasion in

sympathy with yours. Your parents, your instructors, the guardians of this Institution partake of your joy at your past success, and cordially join in your hopes of the future. If their joy is less lively, if their hopes are less vivid, it is because they are mingled with a deep anxiety—it is because they have travelled over the ground you are soon to occupy, and have learnt the dangers now hidden from your sight. You look before you upon the great road of life, and it presents itself to your eyes, smooth as the Appian way, disclosing at every step the most beautiful landscapes, with every thing to invite, allure and refresh you on your journey. I will not attempt to disturb this delightful vision. I would not, if I could, throw a single shade over this bright perspective. It has been, no doubt wisely, ordained that no gloomy anticipations should mar the joyous season of youth. Indulge, then, my young friends, while yet you may, while uncontaminated by and unsuspecting of the world, indulge, in all their freshness, the gay hopes and cheering aspirations, which belong peculiarly to your age, and which constitute at once its blessing and its charm.

It is my purpose to direct your attention for a few moments to one of the most powerful principles of our nature, one which you now feel in active operation, and upon the proper management of which depends much of the happiness and honor and respectability of your future lives. The desire of distinction, the ambition to excel finds a place in every generous bosom. Indeed, so universally is the principle diffused, that scarcely an individual of the human family can be said to be exempt from its influence. It commences with the first expanding faculties of youth, and continues, growing with the growth, until the latest period of life. The voice

of praise is sweet even to the prattling infant, and it falls, not unheeded, on ears that have been dulled by age. In every state of society, from the most barbarous to the most refined; in all the different departments and pursuits of mankind, this ambition to excel, modified in an almost infinite variety as to its objects and means of accomplishment, is to be found exerting its influence with more or less power, and either for good or for evil. It would be doubting the wisdom of Providence to suppose that a principle of such potent energy and such universal existence had not been implanted in us for great and useful purposes. It is true that, like all our passions, it is capable of being perverted and abused.— While on the one hand it has largely contributed to the progress of civilization and the development of the human mind; while it has given birth to all the wonderful achievements in art and discoveries in science; to the splendid productions in ancient and modern literature, which delight, instruct and elevate us—yet, on the other hand, it has too often been the fruitful source of crime and misery and bloodshed and devastation. In one case, it is ambition, pure and virtuous, “pursuing noble ends by noble means”—in the other, ambition, unchecked by moral restraint, originating in selfishness and reckless of the obligations that bind man to man.— Which of these recommends itself to your esteem and affection, I will not insult you by inquiring. But how is the eminence, which is alone to be coveted, the distinction founded on merit, how is it to be obtained? It does not offer itself spontaneously—it will not “unsought be won,” nor is it easy of acquisition; yet there are means by the faithful application of which success will seldom fail to be secured. Permit me briefly to advert to some which readily present them-

selves, and which are adapted to every vocation to which you may be called. First and chief among these means is persevering industry. He, who seeks a lofty summit, must direct his flight with a wing that never tires and an eye that never slumbers. Mental industry is the peculiar characteristic of civilized society. The savage but labors for a scanty daily subsistence, and the rest of his life is spent in bodily exercise, in the sports of the chase, in ferocious battle, or in slothful indolence. When the light of civilization first illumines the mind, man awakens as it were to a new existence. He becomes conscious of the powers of intellect and proud of the superiority they confer. As he cultivates them, he perceives his views constantly extending and his faculties becoming more and more invigorated. He looks abroad through the intellectual and physical world, and is every day discovering some new secret of nature which charms and instructs him. One discovery but makes him the more eager for another. He finds nothing too subtle to elude his grasp, nothing too swift to escape his pursuit, nothing too strong to resist his power. There seems, indeed, to be scarcely any other limit to the extent of intellectual improvement than that which is imposed by the frail and perishing tenure by which it has pleased Providence that we shall hold our corporeal tenement. But remember, my young friends, that our minds can only become thus vast and comprehensive by constant exercise and by unremitting labor in adding to their stores. Exercise is not more necessary to preserve health in the bodily system than it is to give vigor to the intellectual. It is an immutable law of our nature that enervation is the necessary and inevitable effect of sloth and indolence. The mind not only requires, like the body, its fit exercise; it also

demands its appropriate food. You must supply it with facts. You must furnish it daily with new accessions of knowledge. The art of printing, that greatest of all arts, has enabled you to seize and appropriate to your own use the fruits of the experience, the observation and reflection of others for thousands of years. Not to avail yourselves of these would be, in some measure, to relapse into barbarism. It would be as gross a folly, as if a mariner were to undertake to traverse extensive and dangerous seas without the aid of charts, which the enterprize and observation of others had provided. But the acquisition of knowledge is not alone sufficient. It must be accompanied by reflection. The mind must be so disciplined as to be able to dispose of the facts it receives in proper order—otherwise they will form a huge, misshapen and useless mass. To crowd the mind with knowledge, when its reasoning faculties are suffered to slumber, is like oppressing the stomach with food when it has lost its powers of digestion. While, therefore, you avail yourselves of the reflections and information of others and of your own observations, exercise your understanding in separating truth from error and in drawing such conclusions as will best enable you “to act well your part in life”—the great purpose of all knowledge. There is a common mistake among the young, and perhaps more particularly among those of collegiate institutions, that while industrious application is necessary for ordinary capacities, genius requires no exertion. It is an error, which has proved fatal to many a youth of the fairest promise. Be assured, it is an error which you cannot reject with too much promptness and reject forever. You read the productions of the master-spirits of the ages in which they lived, upon which the stamp

of genius of the highest order has been impressed by the concurring voice of all mankind. Think you that these immortal works sprung from the brain of their authors, without effort and in full proportion, like the fabled Pallas from the brain of Jupiter? No, my young friends; if we could summon before us these illustrious dead, they would tell us of their long course of preparation; that their minds had been disciplined from early life; that they had diligently collected knowledge from every accessible source; that they had reflected long and deeply; that they labored for years in improving their understanding, cultivating their taste, and purifying and exalting their imagination. All biography proves that by such means, and such only, can solid and permanent literary distinction be obtained.

But you must not only be industrious; you must persevere in your industry. Let every point you reach be only the place for a new departure. Let every acquisition you make be the foundation for another and yet another. Take example in one respect from the miser, and heap treasure on treasure. Like him, you will feel no satiety from the accumulation, and, unlike him, the happiness you will derive from your riches will be founded on the noblest, instead of the basest, principles of our nature. Let no difficulties dishearten or deter you—rather let them animate your zeal. Perseverance can level mountains and elevate vallies. Aim at the highest degree of perfection, and you may safely act upon the conviction that what has been accomplished by others may be attained by you. Indeed, since no limits to the human intellect have yet been defined, why may you not surpass those, who have preceded you?

I trust, my young friends, you will not be startled by this

recommendation of constant diligence. You will form a most erroneous notion, if you suppose that you are thus exhorted to a life of pain, of gloom or of irksome toil. *Labor et ipse voluptas.* You will find that occupation is one of the secrets of happiness. You will find in the pursuit of knowledge that what the eloquent Psalmist has said of religious wisdom is true, to no small extent, of the wisdom of this world—"all her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace."

Let me urge upon you, as another means of obtaining distinction, the practice of all the moral virtues. I speak of these, now, only as connected with my subject, and not as enjoined upon you by the highest of all obligations, the command of your Creator. It is true there have been instances in which individuals have gained a niche in the Temple of Fame, whose characters have been sullied by vice and sometimes stained by crime. But with how much more lustre would they have shone, if virtue had been associated with their talents? The admiration they receive is not an unmixed admiration. While their intellectual attainments invite us towards them, we are repelled with horror by their moral depravity. Who has not felt the keenest mortification, in reading the effusions of the most powerful bard of modern days, who wrote with a pen of fire, that such brilliant genius should have been obscured by vice and too often prostituted to the most unhallowed purposes! How much more lofty would have been his pedestal, if he had suffered it to be based on virtue! Such instances, though they do occur, are exceptions to a general law of our nature. Indulgence of vicious propensities, carelessness of moral obligations, have an inevitable tendency, not only to destroy the moral sense,

but to enervate the intellectual faculties. Besides the waste of time they often occasion, they produce pain, discontent, fretfulness, remorse, indisposition to serious occupation or serious thought. The mind gradually loses its tension and sinks in an equal degree with the moral principle. The practice of virtue, on the other hand, gives self-satisfaction, peace, serenity and contentment; the mind is suffered in quietness to pursue the even tenor of its way and the course to honor and distinction is left unobstructed.

Firmness and decision of character are indispensable to your success. The weak, vacillating individual, who is every thing by starts and nothing long; who yields to every sally of caprice and impulse of feeling; who is the good-natured victim of every artful or imprudent associate, must never hope to rise beyond mediocrity. Let your resolutions be wisely formed and steadily executed. When your conscience and your understanding point to the object of your pursuit, suffer not yourselves to be diverted to the right or to the left by the importunities or the gibes or sneers of others. Recollect, too, that the "*fortiter in re*" is not incompatible with the "*suaviter in modo*." Urbanity will adorn, without impairing, your firmness.

Honorable in all your thoughts and purposes, you should have nothing to conceal, and therefore candor and openness should mark your whole conduct and character. From the man of dissimulation, the man of art, the suspicious man, we shrink with innate dread and dislike. Candor alone inspires confidence and commands respect.

It may be useful to urge upon all, who wish to excel, the necessity of relying upon their own exertions. If you possess the adventitious aids of wealth or influential friends,

they may be used to second, but not to supersede, your efforts; and fortunate indeed will you be, if you do not find them clogs to your advancement. If you are destitute of what are usually considered worldly advantages, be not discouraged—cheer yourselves with the reflection that, under our happy political institutions, there is no royal road to honor and distinction, and that some of the most illustrious individuals of this and other ages have risen from the humblest to the highest stations, unaided by power or patronage or wealth.

In the desultory remarks I have been addressing to you, I have not spoken of the influence of the Christian religion in promoting your success, even in this life. It is a theme which belongs more appropriately to holier lips than mine—to lips, that have been touched with sacred fire. Yet I may be pardoned for assuring you, that, while nothing can throw a brighter lustre round your character than the genuine principles and unostentatious practice of piety, so nothing can impart such pure and high and ennobling motives to exertion and nothing can bring such imposing power to sustain and strengthen you in every virtuous resolution.

But one topic more, and I will hasten to conclude—a topic which I could not omit, both from its intrinsic importance and because it would be doing injustice to your gallantry and my own, in an assembly where the smiles of beauty are beaming all around us. It is the influence of female society in the improvement of your minds and the formation of your character. Woman has been ordained to perform a most important part in the moral government of the world. The mother forms the first rudiments of the infant mind, and instils into the infant bosom the first principles of virtuous action. The sister refines and softens the harsher manners and more

turbulent feelings of the brother. The passion for a virtuous mistress purifies the sentiments and elevates the thoughts of the lover; while she binds him in the chains of despotism only to lead him in the paths of honor. The wife brings to the aid of her husband a tender sympathy that robs sorrow of its sting; a fortitude that never quails beneath calamity or distress; a prudence ever vigilant, and an instinctive sagacity that never falters. Such was the influence of woman, even in the days when her sole titles to admiration and respect were her personal charms and the virtues of her heart. Happily in our time education, without diminishing these claims, has added others of the highest character. The cultivation of her intellect has left man little to boast of his assumed superiority. Where can you meet united such refined intelligence; such delicacy of taste; such purity of thought; such utter loathsomeness of vice in every shape; such fortitude in every situation in which we are called on to bear and to suffer, as in woman! Can you fail to be improved by an association which offers to you such examples, clothed in the most captivating form? Not only will you feel the influence on your mental powers, but your sentiments will be freed from all their grossness. In youth there can scarcely be found a more efficient corrective of vicious propensities than the society of virtuous and enlightened woman.—And may I be permitted to turn for a moment to our fair auditors, and remind them that the influence I have truly ascribed to them was not intended to gratify their vanity or swell their pride? May I be permitted to entreat them, by all their loveliness, by all the endearing ties that bind them so closely to our hearts, not to forget their destiny, not to neglect the high capacities with which they are endowed, but to be our bright

exemplars, and to cheer on our youth to all which honorable ambition can attain and all to which it ought to aspire.

My young friends, I have thus adverted to some of the means by which you may acquire an eminence, which no man should blush to possess. Yet you may ask why should you seek it? I should not consult the brevity, which, in my opinion, is a valuable quality in an address of this sort, if I were to enter at large upon this branch of the subject. Let my answer, then, be comprised in a short and imperfect summary. In the first place, it is a law of your Creator implanted in your bosom. You cannot, and you ought not, if you could, totally extinguish the ambition to excel.

Then, I have already remarked there is a pleasure in the very means you take to accomplish your object. What may appear toil to the indifferent spectator, constitutes one of the highest enjoyments the hunter feels in the chase.

And what can be more delightful, what can assimilate us more nearly to Him whose image we bear, than the exercise of the power, which superiority confers, of bestowing blessings on others.

In the estimate of happiness is praise, too, to be set at nought? Even flattery finds many a willing auditor. But who can deny the fascinating power of the voice of praise, when it sounds in unison with the secret whispers of conscience?

Yet we may venture to suggest to you a still higher motive. Though our bodies are perishing, we know that our spirit is immortal—we know that we are placed in this world in a probationary state, and that we are commanded to improve our talents. May it not be, that, in proportion as we cultivate our intellectual and moral faculties here be-

low, in the same proportion will our capacity be extended for enjoyment in another and a higher world? May it not be, that this ambition we feel is "the divinity that stirs within us," leading on to this sublime object?

My young friends, I know I have disappointed the flattering expectations you had formed—expectations, which, I early apprized you, could not be realized. I came here with no vain hope of making an exhibition of oratorical talent.—I came solely to repeat to you useful precepts, which have long received the sanction of the wise and good, and to add my strong and sincere attestation of their truth, from an experience founded on some years devoted to the study of human nature and to an active intercourse with my fellow-man in all his various relations. suffer me to conclude in the language of an inspired writer, a quotation which I heard from the venerable and revered President of my Alma Mater,* many years ago, when I stood in the situation which some of you now occupy. Would that I could impart to it the rich and melodious and impressive tones of eloquence in which it fell from his lips, and which still seem to linger on my ear! And would that it might not only be fixed in your memory, as it has been in mine, but be cherished in your hearts and regulate your lives! "WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE; WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST; WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST; WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE; WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY; WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT, IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE, AND IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE, THINK ON THESE THINGS."

* The Rev'd. Dr. SAMUEL S. SMITH, President of Princeton College, the learned scholar, the accomplished gentleman in all his intercourse with his pupils, and who united in himself, as far as the author of this address could then judge, and as he now believes, fervent piety with as pure and graceful and eloquent oratory as ever adorned the pulpit.





